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CLAUDE MONET
AND HIS PAINTINGS
BY
WILLIAM H. FULLER



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Drawn by Theodore Robinson

(From "Modern French Masters," by permission of the Century Co.)

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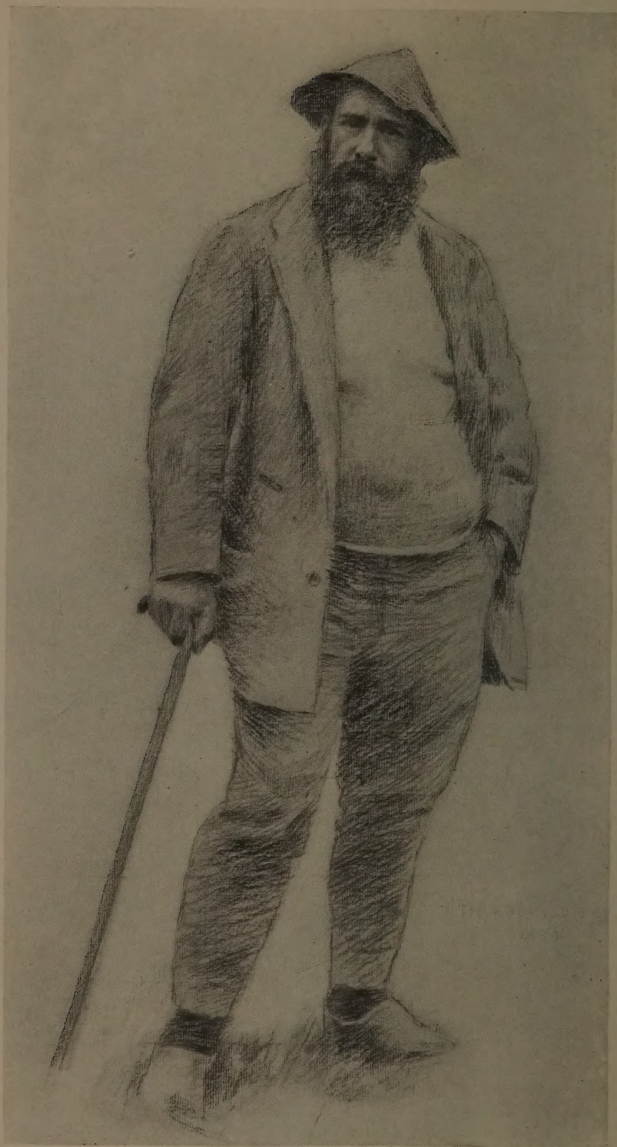
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CLAUDE MONET

THE PAINTINGS

TO

JOHN G. JOHNSON

AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE TO HIS INTEREST IN THE
BEST ART OF EVERY COUNTRY

CLAUDE MONET

AND

HIS PAINTINGS

BY

WILLIAM H. FULLER

IN 1845 a man walked the streets of Paris all day long bearing under his arm a picture that he had tried in vain to sell. None of the dealers would have it, for why should they buy a painting by an artist whose works had been rejected at the Salon? They were merchants; their interest in a work of art was measured by the profit they could make out of it. The bearer of the picture had assured the artist that he would find a purchaser for it, and, though discouraged, he was unwilling to return to Barbizon with the canvas unsold. Happily he remembered that Baroillet—the famous

barytone—was a friend and, in a modest way, a patron of art. He called upon Baroilhet, showed him the picture, and exclaimed: "I offer you a good bargain, and a masterpiece. You can pay, in two installments, two hundred and fifty francs a month." The man was Jules Dupré, and the masterpiece that the singer bought was the "*Hoar Frost*" of Théodore Rousseau.* So too in 1859, when Millet painted "The Angelus," neither dealer nor amateur was eager to possess it; and yet thirty years afterwards, representatives of great galleries in Europe and dealers on both continents battled for it at public auction in Paris, till it was knocked down to the buyer for over five hundred and fifty thousand francs. These are not isolated examples. They are cited because both these well-known pictures afterwards came to America, and one of them has found a permanent home in Mr. Walters' gallery at Baltimore. It was quite the same in the time of Rembrandt and Ruysdael and Frans Hals. "The Rembrandts, which we recognize as so mighty to-day, whose possession represents so much money, were to be had, even when his name and fame were known,

* Albert Wolff: "Cent Chefs d'Œuvre."

for less than you, my pupils, would accept for any study of yours." * All these men at times painted masterpieces ; but it took more than a hundred years to find it out. The pictures themselves had not changed, except for the worse, but public opinion had changed. On the other hand, as we know, many paintings that were the delight of dealers and connoisseurs of former generations are the derision of our own. And so with all this changing opinion about art in the past, can we be absolutely sure that the judgments of to-day will not be reversed by wiser appreciations to-morrow ?

At the present time, and for many years past, both in France and America, the painters of 1830 have justly been held in high repute. Every collector nowadays thinks he must have some samples of the school ; while as for the masterpieces, they are so few that he is a fortunate person who is able to own even one. But so authoritative are the names of these great men, that the public has easily been beguiled into purchasing very commonplace, if not indeed spurious, examples of their work, in preference to far better paintings by comparatively unknown

* John La Farge : "Considerations on Painting."

men. And yet there are those who have the hardihood to believe that even the Barbizon masters have not said the last word in landscape art and closed the book; that in our own generation a new and great landscape painter has appeared in France, whose work has already exercised a powerful influence upon the art of the present day, and is destined to still more distinguished rank in the future. So far as official recognition is concerned, he is the legitimate successor of Théodore Rousseau and Puvis de Chavannes. Like them he has endured the hostility of dealers and critics as well as the condemnation of the Institute; like them he has lived to see the reversal of an ignorant and hostile judgment; and in his mature years has begun to enjoy the fruits of comparative renown. In England, where stubborn conservatism extends even to matters of art, the dealers have not yet bestowed upon Claude Monet the honor of a passing recognition. In Paris and in America, most of them began by treating his pictures with hilarious contempt. Afterwards, when they found that his friends were multiplying and were actually buying his paintings, they changed their attitude to one of patronizing

tolerance that was more insulting than open scorn. But these years of strife, which would have crushed a weaker man, only stimulated Monet to renewed efforts to express with greater fidelity his artistic convictions. All that he was, all that he hoped to be, was dedicated to the representation of nature as he knew her, without the fear or the favor of man. Whether his reputation is ephemeral or enduring, friend and foe alike must award Monet this meed of praise—that he has never sacrificed his self-respect for popular applause nor bartered his art for gold.

Claude Monet was born in Paris, November 14, 1840. His youth was spent at Havre, where his father was a well-to-do merchant. From boyhood he had a predilection for drawing and painting, which his parents discouraged because they wanted him to go into business. Their admonitions, however, made very little impression upon his mind. But one day they thought their hope would be realized. Their son had been drawn in the conscription for seven years' service in Algiers in the First Regiment of the Chasseurs d'Afrique. They believed that this new life of a soldier would

cure him of his folly. But when young Monet reached Algiers, he was so charmed with the country that his purpose to become a painter was confirmed. After a short time he contracted a fever which brought him almost to death's door. He was sent home on a furlough. His parents were so glad to have him back that they purchased a military substitute, and allowed him to pursue his own chosen career. Claude was then twenty-two years old.

While at Havre Monet formed the acquaintance of Eugène Boudin, the sailor and painter of ships and harbors and other subjects connected with the sea. It was Boudin who first advised Monet to paint his pictures wholly in the open air. But, like most beginners, Monet thought he ought to have some great master teach him how to paint. So he went to Paris in 1863 and entered the studio of the classical painter, Charles Gabriel Gleyre. The first week that Monet was there opened his eyes. His master, while correcting his drawing from the model, remarked :

“ Young man, that is pretty good, but too much in the character of the living model. You have before you a thickset man, and you

draw him thickset. When you draw the human form, you must think of the Antique."

Inasmuch as Monet's purpose was to learn how to draw, he could not understand why he should be directed to appeal to his memory of something else to enable him to perform his task. If it were his master's object to have the drawing look like an antique, why have a living model?

Two or three weeks were about all that Monet could stand of that kind of instruction, and he soon persuaded his fellow-students, Renoir and Sisley, to leave with him the "accursed place."

Two years afterwards (1865), Monet sent his first picture to the Salon; it was accepted. The following year also his pictures were admitted. They were well hung, and were well received by the artists and critics. In 1867 he sent to the Salon "The Port of Honfleur" and "Young Women in the Garden." Both were refused. In 1868 he sent a large interior, "Le Déjeuner," and that was refused. The same results followed in 1869 and 1870. The reason assigned for the rejection of Monet's pictures was, that it was dangerous to encourage a man of his tendencies; that to do so

would be the end of art—the Grand Art! Monet then waited ten years, and in 1880 sent to the Salon the superb “*Les Glaçons sur la Seine*”—now owned by Mr. H. O. Havemeyer—and this picture was declined. “It was pretty hard,” the painter said, “but what is one to do?” The doors of the Salon were absolutely closed to his work. The indignity of 1880, however, was the last that he received from the gentlemen of the Institute. He has never since sent a picture to the Salon.

During the fifteen years that elapsed since the acceptance of Monet's picture in 1865 to the rejection in 1880, all the men of the so-called Barbizon School, except Dupré, had passed away. Troyon had died in 1865; Rousseau in 1867; Corot and Millet in 1875; Diaz in 1876, and Daubigny in 1878. Had Monet been willing to become their follower and imitator, doubtless he would have attained some sort of success. But he was a born leader, as he was a born painter, and no consideration of personal advancement could swerve him one hair's breadth from the path he had marked out for himself the day he left behind him the benumbing influences of Gleyre for the teachings of nature and the light of day. He took

Boudin's advice, and ever afterwards painted his pictures in the open air. In the beginning he did a little in the way of caricature—an art which his friend Daumier raised to such distinction—but it was landscape that he most delighted to paint. He cared very little for portraiture or for figure subjects, although sometimes he introduced figures into his landscapes for the purpose of giving them a note of human interest, in contrast to Corot's nymphs, which seemed to be used as a device for imparting to his subjects a pseudo-classical spirit.

Monet's method of work is simple. He uses canvases that are very smooth and very white. He sketches his subjects in charcoal, then rapidly lays in the colors until he has secured the general aspect of the scene, after which he proceeds with the greatest care until the altered conditions of light warn him to desist. The canvas is then put aside for another day with similar conditions, when he resumes his work. This process he continues until his picture is finished. He frequently paints the same subject many times, and these varied paintings are known as Monet's "series"—as, for example, "The Haystacks," "Float-

ing Ice," "Étretat," "Pourville," "Antibes," "Belle Isle," "Le Petit Creuse," "The Tulips of Holland," "The Rouen Cathedrals," and many more—and yet in every series no two pictures are alike. I suppose he has painted "The Haystacks," one of his most famous subjects, at least twenty times. They stood in a neighbor's field close to Monet's house. He began to paint them when they were first made. He portrayed them in summer, in the autumn, and in winter; in the morning, at noon, and at twilight; sometimes sparkling with dew, sometimes enveloped in fog, sometimes covered with frost, sometimes laden with snow; and though each picture was different from all the rest, one scarcely knew which to choose, they were all so true and beautiful.

It was the same with the "Cathedrals." Monet spent two successive winters at Rouen painting that series; and while it is his favorite, and is considered by him his finest work, it is probably the one least understood or cared for by the public. They suppose that Monet was trying, with little success, to paint curious architectural forms; but in fact, his object was to render the marvelous play of light and color which different conditions of

atmosphere and time of day produce upon the Cathedral's imposing façade.

The manner of painting nature that Monet has adopted discloses an absolute sincerity of purpose in his art, and, besides, reveals to us many a hidden charm which has been passed unnoticed by less sensitive and observant eyes. Moreover, the limitations he has imposed upon himself involve a prodigious amount of labor, and, it may be added, some failures as well. But these failures are never taken up, revised, and finished in a studio, and then offered for sale. Last summer he made a bonfire of a lot of unfinished paintings which he thought were not worthy of his name. But when he has been able to finish his pictures as he likes ; when he has fully expressed all that he saw and felt in the beginning, what a splendid success he attains ! The little group of paintings in this exhibition fairly represents his finished work. And what a revelation of nature, what a variety of subject, what a display of one man's power ! Fill the room with the works of any single painter of the Barbizon School and see if they will cover as wide a range, be as true to nature, as free from monotony, and of as high an average excellence,

as these pictures by Claude Monet. When we think of the work of Corot, Rousseau, Diaz, Daubigny, or Dupré, there instantly occurs to our minds a certain type of landscape which each painted. But what picture in this collection will stand for the perfect, full-rounded art of Monet? In one we see the delicacy and charm of Corot, with an added splendor of color that Corot never used ; in another, the sweep and vigor of Courbet, but with finer movement and more glorious light. Nay, at his best, has Courbet ever painted anything to compare with the flashing sunlight and the whitecapped waters that break upon the rocks of Belle Isle?

It may be interesting, perhaps, to look at some of these pictures a little in detail. Here is Octave Mirbeau's description of one :

"First a field of oats of a pale green, almost colorless under the ardent midday sun ; a little path across it like a ribbon of gold ; then some thick wheat almost ripe rises up like a wall, and behind the wheat little tree tops of a deep green color. You see it is nothing, but it is a grand picture. All this bit of nature breathes a silence, a tranquility, the heaviness of summer heat."

Look at another. At the first glance it may not be as fully understood as the picture just described. But study it a bit. There has been a storm. All day long the waves have been surging and breaking upon the rocky shore. Now the wind is dying out and the sea is becoming calm. The red sun is struggling through a bank of sullen clouds, apparently shorn of its power, as it slowly sinks to the horizon ; but it still flings its radiance across the dome of the sky, from which are reflected the colors and the light that fall upon the restless, foam-covered waters below. In the middle distance, with its flying buttress and its half-submerged cathedral spire, grim in its solitude, stands the dark, impressive cliff of Étretat. Unique in composition, splendid in color, suggestive in sentiment, Monet has painted in this picture one of the most transient as well as one of the most beautiful phases of the glory of the sky and sea.

Take another—"Morning at Antibes." Do not fully accept your first impressions. It will grow upon you. Observe how skillfully the picture has been composed ; notice also the purity and the harmony of the colors ; see how finely drawn are the wide-spreading

branches of the tree in the foreground, through which we catch glimpses of the pale blue receding sky. Under it, like an opal, lie the waters of the bay, tremulous with light. On the farther shore the distant hills are tinged with the first flush of morning light, while at their feet, like an enchanted city, sleeps the old fortress of Antibes. In conception and in rendering this picture is the embodiment of all the poetry, all the beauty, and all the mystery of the Dawn.

Of the "Haystack Series," two of the most lovely examples are shown in this exhibition. Each picture possesses a distinct charm of its own, arising from the particular time of the morning at which it was painted. It was not the ordinary aspect of haystack and field, ploughed furrow and the distant hillside, that charmed the painter, but the whole landscape, enveloped and unified by the exquisite lace-work of the frost—this it was that evoked the marvels of his brush. He saw the scene covered with a white transparent veil that lightly lay upon the bosom of the earth ; nay, more, he saw the lace-work of frost and the misty morning air all lighted up and warmed by the radiance of the rising sun reflected from the

arches of the sky. In these two paintings Monet has portrayed with wonderful realism two transitory aspects of early morning (closely related, but different) with schemes of color that are as delicate as the petals of a rose.

Two years ago I went to Rouen to see the old Cathedral, mainly because it had been painted by Monet. The weather was fine, and every time-worn statue and lichen-covered stone in the façade stood out in sharp relief in the clear atmosphere of a cloudless summer day. As I stood before the great edifice, I appreciated in some degree the difficulty Monet must have had in attempting to give it pictorial representation. Indeed it seemed to me to be an impossible task. Low, squalid buildings had crowded themselves close to it on every side except the front, from which a plaza extended some three or four hundred feet to one of the principal streets. But the façade which I beheld that day was not the façade that had inspired Monet. He saw it under totally different conditions of atmosphere and light from mine. In none of his pictures that I have seen has he represented the entire front of the Cathedral; in every in-

stance he has chosen certain portions only to portray. In the one in this collection, he has selected the great central part of the façade and a section of the tower on its left. The time is early morning. The front is seen in shadow, like an apparition in the mist, clothed in wondrous shades of blue. The mysterious triple portals, like great grottoes of the sea, are faintly illumined by some unknown light within. The grand, imposing tower—the dominant feature of the picture—rears its head to unknown heights out of an enveloping fog which the warm, invading sunshine is slowly driving away. Everywhere details are swallowed up; only massive forms are revealed; proportions are magnified, and strange, phantasmal objects are disclosed through the myriad prisms of the vaporous air. Some of them have the solidity of an earthly structure, while others are as ethereal as the visions of a dream. What we see in this picture was, in fact, Monet's vision. In the deep shadows are the tones of sapphire; in the higher lights those of pale turquoise; along the illumined sides of the tower the glow of amber; while in the morning sky the hidden fires of the opal slumber. In my observation, no painter

of his time has ever before produced a picture so full of mystery and poetic feeling, expressed with such subdued splendor of color and with such impressive vigor, as this example of "The Cathedrals of Rouen."

Turning to the general aspect of Monet's works, it must first of all be said that his paintings are the expression of a sensitive, original, and forceful personality. And in every branch of art what is there that gives it value but the individuality of man? Great artists are revealed through their paintings. Clever fingers may copy their processes with wonderful fidelity, but they cannot take the place of a creative brain. In his sphere of art Monet is a creator. He sees nature in his own way and he paints her with a method of his own. No trace of another artist's influence destroys the individuality of his work. When he begins a picture he never thinks how Daubigny, Rousseau, or any other famous landscape painter would have represented his subject, but he paints it in the manner which will present most vividly his impression of the beauty, poetry, or grandeur of the scene. Fortunately for the integrity of his art, Monet

has studied nature far more devotedly than he has observed the processes of painting employed by any member of the Barbizon School. The result is that his pictures are original in expression ; they are vibrant with life, and full of the qualities of a sincere and highly gifted man.

Moreover, every picture that Monet paints is distinguished, among other qualities, for its pictorial unity. He sees nature synthetically ; he paints it pictorially. Indeed, the true function of a landscape painter is to express the noble truths of nature, rather than to record the mere physical facts that he sees before him. This, at least, is Monet's method of interpretation. His landscapes, therefore, possess the potent charm of simplicity and dignity unmarred by perplexing details. Nor is this pictorial quality the result of a lucky accident or a happy choice of subject. Nature never presents to an artist a perfectly completed picture, leaving to him the simple task of copying it on his canvas. The fund of material that she furnishes is exhaustless, but the use which the artist makes of it determines the value of his performance. When Monet paints a landscape he keeps steadily in

view the dominant motive of his picture, to which all minor details are made subordinate. These serve a useful part, it is true, but it is one of appropriate contribution to enhance the value of the work as a whole. To secure this result he knows what to leave out—a rare virtue in landscape art—as well as what to emphasize in his picture. This method of treatment involves an intelligent comprehension of his subject, an easy command of his brush, an orderly and artistic arrangement of the various parts of his picture, and calls into play one of the highest and most pleasurable functions of the human mind. In his early life, as he once remarked to me, he often completed a canvas at a single sitting; “but now,” he modestly added, “I am more exacting, and it takes a long time for me to finish a picture.” In his efforts to realize the complete pictorial aspect of his subject, Monet does not neglect the truthful portrayal of any object that forms a constituent part of his work. Test it by the pictures in this exhibition. Run your eye over them with a little care and note with what wonderful fidelity he has painted water, snow, ice, fields of grain, rocks, fog, sunshine, atmosphere, mist, break-

ing waves, fleeing clouds, and the bending sky. But in all this wonderful variety of subjects one lovely phase of nature is missed. When I asked Monet if he had ever painted a moonlight picture, he said :

“ I greatly admire moonlights, and from time to time have made studies of them ; but I have never finished any of these studies because I found it so difficult to paint nature at night. Some day, however, I may finish such a picture.”

But if Monet has failed thus far in painting to his own satisfaction this enchanting appearance of the sky at night, he has succeeded in portraying with marvelous exactness the varied manifestations of the sky by day. Certainly one of the most difficult things in nature to paint is the changeable morning or evening sky. Still more difficult is it to paint this subject in harmonious relation to a particular landscape or sea. But Monet's pictures, almost without exception, show how successfully this work has been performed. There are many other things besides clouds and skies that are difficult to paint, and yet Monet has portrayed them with equal fidelity and power. Notice, for example, his painting of water. As he represents it, his

water is never thick, pasty, or dry. On the contrary, it is liquid, transparent, full of local color, and wet. At times it has an exquisite limpidity in repose, while at others it has motion, sparkle, and life, compared with which Courbet's celebrated "Wave" is sculptured ice, and Dupré's muddy marines too often a travesty of the actual sea.

Another charm about Monet's work is his atmosphere and light. His pictures are filled with an atmosphere that we can breathe, and with the real light of day—that beneficent light which greets us in the morning and continues till the evening hour ; that all-pervading light which is diffused according to nature's laws, instead of the laws of studio creation. Nowhere, therefore, will you find in his work patches of color representing the high lights of a picture placed in the midst of an impossible gloom. He sees nowhere in nature the forced and violent contrasts of light and shade which are found in so many celebrated landscapes of former schools. The example which Monet has set in this respect has not been without influence in the landscape painting of the present day. Go where you will, in all modern exhibitions you will find a noticeable

change in the pitch of light compared with the dark and heavy colors of a generation ago. To Claude Monet more than to any other living painter this welcome change is due. Monet's own temperament lends a joyous vitality to his pictures. To him nature is not sad even in the robes of winter, but is full of exuberant life and beauty. He sees her often in a poetic aspect, and always as a lover. The sorrows and the ugly things of earth find no interpreter in him. The talismanic words of his art are Truth, Light, and Beauty.

It has been frequently urged, with an insistence more vehement than wise, that Monet paints phases of nature with which we are not familiar, and that therefore his representations are untrue. To which it may be replied that our beloved future fellow-citizen of the Philippines has never seen snow, nor the Laplander June roses. The illustration is rather far-fetched, but it will do. The fact is, most men, and possibly some critics, know very little about nature, except in those ordinary conditions which have to do with the comforts or discomforts of their daily lives. And yet, with serene confidence in their own experience, and

totally ignorant of the purpose of the artist, they do not hesitate to condemn as untrue the works of a man who has spent his whole mature life in a profound study of nature in all her moods, who stands face to face with her, brush in hand, ready to record the pictorial impression which a particular scene has made upon his mind.

Another set of critics, more numerous and perhaps more voluble, condemn Monet because they say he is an Impressionist. Just what they mean by this term is a little difficult to understand, mainly because those who use it do not know what they mean themselves. If by "impressionist" they mean a man who paints nature hastily, vaguely, crudely, with only "a slight, indistinct remembrance," then in Monet's case nothing could be farther from the truth. If, on the other hand, they mean "a man who relies upon his immediate impressions to reproduce a scene in nature vividly and truthfully," then Monet is the very prince of impressionists. But if, without any knowledge of the rightful meaning of the term they employ, they simply wish to indicate that he paints nature in a manner different from that in which they have been used to seeing it painted,

then it must be admitted that the charge is true. And yet, despite the almost universal homage paid to the men of 1830, to say nothing of famous painters of far older schools, I cannot resist the conviction that Monet's landscapes come nearer to the truthful representation of that world in which we live and move than many a canvas whose commercial value to-day outweighs fifty times its weight in gold. In truth no man can paint nature as she actually exists. No eye has ever seen the infinite variety of forms—some of them microscopic—of which nature is composed. No eye can possibly discern even a fractional part of all the subtle glories of color with which the world is filled. And even if it could, how futile the attempt to express them with such things as canvas and pigments and oil and brushes—the inadequate implements of the artist's trade! Moreover, if these means were entirely adequate to the purpose in hand, selection must necessarily be made; and the portrayal of those truths which impress him most becomes the artist's picture. The fact is, all landscape painters are "impressionists," differing only in kind and degree according to their mental constitution, their manner of painting,

and the place where their work is performed. Corot was an impressionist ; so were Rousseau, Daubigny, Dupré and the rest. In a marked degree Millet was one. The late Wyatt Eaton, himself an artist, who made many visits to Barbizon and enjoyed the friendship of the great painter, records in his biographical sketch of Millet this interesting conversation :

“ I once said to him that he must have a remarkable memory to be able to work, as was his wont, without nature before him. He replied that in that sense he had not, but that which touched his heart he retained. In regard to working from nature he said : ‘ I can say I have never painted (or worked) from nature ’ ; and gave as his reason, ‘ *nature does not pose.* ’ ” And so Millet, too, painted his memories—his vivid impressions of things that “ touched his heart.” Ruskin says :

“ The function of an artist is to receive a strong impression from a scene and then set himself as far as possible to reproduce that impression on the mind of the spectator of his picture.” Turner, who was certainly the greatest landscape painter that England has produced, was, in the fullness of his powers,

constantly painting his impressions. So careful had been his study of nature and so phenomenal was his memory that he was able to reproduce whole scenes from notes and drawings made upon the backs of letters or loose scraps of paper. Sometimes he wrought in a realm of fancy, and gave to the world "The Bay of Baiae," and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," in which he epitomized his impressions of the historic charm and loveliness of Italian scenery. When a fellow artist complained to him that upon revisiting Domodossola he had found a particular view entirely changed from what he had admired before, Turner replied, "What, do you not know yet, at your age, that you ought to paint your *impressions*?" If Monet had been asked when and where one should paint his impressions, his answer would have been, "Paint them on the spot."

After all, the real reason for not understanding the works of Monet or any other great painter, lies not so much in the artist as in ourselves. He represents nature as it appears to him. In every subject that he paints he has found something which has stirred his emotion; something that has touched his soul. And yet the thing that inspired his painting

may awaken no response in the breast of another man. In such a case there has not been established a sympathy between the painter and the spectator; and unless that exists one can never thoroughly appreciate and enjoy a picture. The same thing is often true of music. How many people are there in the whole world who can adequately appreciate the works of the great composers? And is a great musician any the less a great artist if because of duller ears his music fails to strike a sympathetic chord? John La Farge admirably says: "The work of art may remain silent to many, even to those who understand it more or less. It is an appeal to another mind, and it cannot draw out more than that mind contains." But even if there were this natural receptivity on our part, many of us are prejudiced at the outset by an antecedent training as to landscape painting with which the works of Claude Monet are not in accord. All our lives we have been looking at landscapes through the spectacles of the famous painters of the past. We look at new pictures and (unconsciously) compare them with impressions of the works of the Dutch or Flemish masters, or perhaps with our remembrances

of the Early English or the Barbizon School. Rarely, if ever, do we compare them with our recollection of nature itself, and when we subject Monet's paintings to this perfect standard what a world of truth and beauty they reveal.

The life which Monet has lived has unquestionably exercised a powerful influence upon his choice of subjects and his method of painting; moreover, it explains the truth and wonderful vitality with which his pictures are filled. "Although born in Havre," he has said, "I have always lived in the country or on the sea-coast, except from 1864 to 1866, when I had a studio in Paris. Since 1883 I have lived at Giverny on the Seine." Fifty years in the country! Half a century in the presence of scenes which became as familiar to him as the face of his mother—this gives the keynote, the very inspiration of Monet's art.

"The son of the land is her seer, and none other. He knows her joys, her melancholy moods; he is familiar with the face of winter on her snow-clad hills, and of spring in the nook of her valleys; he alone knows the secrets of the life that has moulded the form of

every creature of nature on the soil, where as a child he has beat the bushes, where as a youth he has loved, where as a man he has worked, lived, produced and suffered. . . . Since all these things speak to him, it is he who must tell us what they tell him." *

I have quoted these eloquent words of the great French writer and critic because they so aptly apply to the life and the work of Claude Monet. In another part of his book the author speaks of the "Impressionists," and singles out Monet for special praise. He says :

"Nature is in truth so wide a world that in the revolution of ages art will forever find unexplored realms and fresh springs of pictorial beauty. Action is one of these springs ; Rubens, Eugène Delacroix, and Corot had already drunk of it. In these days, when every outlet of energy tends to specializing, the impressionists have made a specialty of the movement of coloured masses. Their formula is harsh, summary, necessarily rapid, and it appears incomplete ; but it is not so, since when the sensation of movement is impressed on the spectator, their aim is attained ; they have nothing more

* Ernest Chesneau : "The Education of the Artist," p. 49. Translated by Clara Bell, London, 1886.

to say. Within these self-imposed limits they have produced some works of prodigious and illusory effect ; such as ' Floating Ice on the Seine,' by M. Monet, and his ' Spring-time at Argenteuil ;' and again his admirable marine studies, in which we see for the first time in my experience, a living presentment of the throbbing, swelling, deeply sighing sea, the trickling rills of water that follow a retreating wave, the glaucous hues of the deep ocean, the violet transparency of the shallows over a sandy bottom—all the transient glories of changeful colour, all the fairy play of moving light. But in spite of such works as these the eye of the public—trained to exclusiveness with other, and no less legitimate, readings of nature, and perverted in a great measure by the abuse of facile tricks of painting—refuses as yet to recognize the purpose and merit of this school. But they will come to it." *

Since Ernest Chesneau wrote those words more than a decade has passed, freighted with the triumphs of Monet's art. But, within the limited range of his observation, Chesneau spoke with intelligence, eloquence, and author-

* Chesneau : " The Education of the Artist," pp. 216-17.

ity. His error lies in confounding Monet with other painters—imitators and followers—whom he classes as “impressionists,” and whose “specialty,” he says, is “the movement of coloured masses.” Monet has no “specialty.” On the contrary, the range of his art is as wide as his sympathies with nature and his power to give them adequate expression. As for any “formula” in his treatment of nature, he does not know the word. Monet can paint “movement” and action with marvelous skill if he desires, but that ability is the very thing which enables him to suggest by contrast immobility and repose. Chesneau evidently had in mind a very different class of artists from the real Monet when he criticised the “Impressionists,” and described their purposes and limitations. Monet has always suffered from being classed with a group of men above whose level he towers like a mountain peak. In all fairness he must be judged by his own performances, and by them alone.

Like every other sympathetic artist, Monet has his preferences among those engaged in the same calling as himself. Of the men who lived and worked at Barbizon he told me he most admired Millet; while among other paint-

ers his favorites were Delacroix, Ingres, Corot, Manet, Courbet, Yongkind, Daumier, Renoir, Degas, and Chavannes. This is a very different company from those unnamed painters whose aim was "satisfied" when they impressed "the sensation of movement" upon the spectator. And yet, in the main, Chesneau spoke with the judgment of an intelligent observer and the forecast of a prophet.

I cannot close this brief and altogether inadequate notice of Monet's works without repeating his frank, almost pathetic, words concerning himself :

"It is not agreeable to talk of one's self; and then upon certain points my memory fails. What I *do* know is, that life with me has been a hard struggle, not for myself alone, but for my friends as well. And the longer I live the more I realize how difficult a thing painting is, and in one's defeat he must patiently strive on."

Ah, yes, painting grows more and more difficult as year by year one's ideals reach a loftier height and demand a nobler interpretation. For nearly thirty years Monet was fighting his own battle, with little to sustain him but a stout heart and an absorbing love

of his art. But now the struggle is ended ;
and in the fullness of his powers the greatest
landscape painter of the present time enjoys
the fruits of a well-deserved fame.

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BY
CLAUDE MONET

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JANUARY, 1899

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